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The Indians have great faith in the power of their a'hót. One of my Indian guides, Tajo ["slash" --Translator] by name (so called because he had a scar on his face) in order to prove to me the indubitable power of the a'hóts, and the crass ignorance of the whites who deny their existence, told me the following:

"It happened that a tribe was returning from a sugar plantation in the province of Salta. It was the season of algarrobo pods and one night all the people were celebrating, singing and dancing. Suddenly they became aware of the approach of a white man who was singing -- they could hear the noise made by the horse's hooves and by the large silver spurs.

"As soon as he arrived at the place where the people were gathered he halted and began to scold them for what they were doing, wishing to put a stop to their activity. The people did not like the white man's interference and said to the hayagüe ["witch doctor"--Translator] that he make him go away. The hayagüe, unable to bring this about by peaceful means said to the white who was insisting on stopping and profaning the celebration:

"'Now you will see if we are useless people and how strong is the a'hót.' He bent down, covered himself and shouted to the a'hót. 'Strike the white man down with an arrow and make him see if it is true that we are worthless people.' 'It is well,' answered the a'hót.

"Immediately a sound was heard coming up from beneath the ground, like the snapping of a stick. It was an arrow which had struck home. The white man suddenly slumped from off his horse. He was dead. The a'hót had shot the arrow into him because the white man had not wanted to believe in the a'hót."

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The whole tribe swears to have witnessed the whole thing.

It is remarkable that the object, if not of worship then at least of recognition, be of an evil nature; for in the last analysis the a'hót is nothing [203] if not an evil power or one capable of evil. If we wish to consider such a recognition as the first glimmering of a religion, then we must confess that religion has as its base, fear of evil and the desire to command it.

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the mother, these are at once set down as the operation of evil spirits. The parents, especially the father, are released from the restriction laid upon them by custom as soon as the child is assumed to have become independent of the physical and mental constitution of its parents.

Among the Chaco Indians, there does not exist any ceremonies corresponding to our baptism, but a *name* is always given the new-born child. The Chaco Indians name their children after animals, birds, reptiles (for instance Bird, Alligator, Lizard), or after bodily peculiarities observed in the child (for instance: Tsihnilak, »Paunchy», a Choroti name), but the names seem on the whole to be given at random and not with the same discrimination which is the rule among some Indians of tropical South America. There is however one peculiar feature to be noted in this respect: the reluctance generally displayed by the Indians to mention their real names. I very rarely heard the Indians using each other's names in their daily conversations, and if one wished to find out the name of a certain Indian, this was as a rule extremely difficult. When a Choroti, a Mataco, or a Toba went to the settlements of the whites to work, he usually assumed a special European name for that time. Such names they never had any objection to mentioning, but they were extremely unwilling to tell me their proper native names. Only on certain occasions — for instance, at the drinking-feasts when all were in high spirits and very good friends — did it happen that the Indians told me one another's names. The native name, received in early childhood, is the real name and is to a certain degree taboo. To reveal it is a perilous thing, especially if the individual *himself* does it. It is to put oneself wholly in the power of an unknown stranger and wilfully to expose oneself to mysterious dangers.

As we shall find later on, the names of the dead are particularly taboo.

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men abstain from eating fish for some time after the death of a near relation.

Apart from the custom of cutting the hair neither the Tobas nor other Pilcomayo tribes nowadays practise ceremonial mutilations of any kind. Formerly however, as the Tobas told me, they practised the following mourning custom. When a woman died, her eldest son had to cut off one of his finger nails. The nail was fastened to a string and hung round the neck of a dog, which was thereafter driven away. If the son omitted to do this, it was believed that the soul of the woman would enter into the nail and kill him in the shape of a tiger into which it would transform itself. This could be prevented by sending away the nail. The dog carrying it away would meet some other tribesman into which the soul would enter and thus become harmless. for the spirits of the dead are harmful only to the nearest relatives. The Indian who told me this added that the custom is no longer practised by the Tobas, because nowadays it very seldom happens that people are killed by tigers and thus the belief that women are changed into such beasts after death has lost its foundation. This again, according to the Indian belief, is owing to the fact that the medicine-men are now able to provide against such sad eventualities by their incantations and conjurations.

As to the explanation of these observances, we have already seen that the abstention from eating fish is due to the idea that the death-demon may possibly hide in the fish and gain entrance into the body. Of special interest are the mourning customs relating to hair and nails. Hair-cutting as a mourning practice of women is met with among most South American Indians and — like other kinds of mutilation — are essentially purification ceremonies of purely magical significance. In the hair and the nails according to primitive belief the vital power of the human body is concentrated. One who possesses these essential parts of a person's body is believed to possess his soul, through which he will be able to exert magical influence upon him. If this is so, it is conceivable that invisible supernatural enemies would take particular interest in these parts. Consequently, when a woman is in a delicate situation, she takes the precaution to remove and destroy these critical parts of her body. According to Indian belief, women are always more exposed to supernatural dangers than men, and therefore have to be more careful in every respect.

The fear of the dead is also manifested in that their *names* are forbidden to be mentioned. This is another general superstition among the

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Chaco tribes. These savages as a rule are very reluctant to mention their true Indian names. Thus, as I have mentioned before, when the Chaco Indians visit the whites they nearly always assume names for use instead of their real names. If the Indians are thus careful with the names of the living, those of the dead are particularly regarded as taboo and must never be mentioned, especially by the nearest relatives. When I asked one of my Indian friends about the name of a man who had just died, he hesitated for a moment, looked round, and when he saw that no one of the relatives was near, he *whispered* the name in my ear. This superstition, I believe, is ultimately based on the idea, held by all Indians, that *the soul of a person is inherent in his name*. To know a person's name is therefore the same as to have his soul in one's power, and supernatural influences can be exerted upon him through this invisible part of his personality, just as they can be exerted through a lock of his hair or a piece of his nail. If the soul is believed to be in the name, we can easily understand why the names of the dead are especially taboo. To mention it is the same as to enter into close contact with the departed soul itself, to which the infection of death is attached, and this is supposed to entail unfortunate consequences, at least for the nearest relatives. For an outsider there is evidently not the same personal danger. But since a person may be controlled and conjured through his name, it is further believed that the rest of the dead in the grave may be disturbed by mentioning his name. It is therefore considered a dreadful indiscretion against the relatives to speak of the deceased by name. This is the idea prevailing both among the Tobas and among other Chaco tribes. Generally the Indians do not like to speak about the dead at all, and if they do, their tacit maxim is: *de mortuis nil nisi bene*. The relatives would never admit that they fear a dead parent and regard him as malicious. They always pronounce him to be »good«, as if believing that by such a euphemism they may change his character or paralyse the harmful effects arising from him.

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